


ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S
DON'TS



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Abraham Lincoln's Don'ts

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Abraham Lincoln's Don'ts

“**S**TAND BY your principles,
stand by your guns, and victory,
complete and permanent, is sure at the last.”

“IT IS NOT BEST to swap
horses while crossing a stream.”

“**I**T HAS BEEN SAID of the world's history hitherto that ‘*Might Makes Right.*’ It is for us and our times to reverse the maxim, and to show that right makes might.”

“IF IT MUST BE that I go down, let me go down linked to truth, and with colors flying.”

A b r a h a m L i n c o l n ' s D o n ' t s

“**T**HERE IS NO more dangerous or expensive analysis than that which consists of trying a man.”

“**A**NSWER with facts, not with arguments.”

“**S**TEER from point to point—no farther than you can see.”

“**B**ETTER give your path to a dog than to be bitten by him in contesting for it.”

“IT IS NOT, ‘Can any of us imagine better?’ but, ‘Can we all do better?’ ”

“WE SHALL sooner have the fowl by hatching the egg than by smashing it.”

“**P**OSTERITY has done nothing for us, and, theorize on it as we may, practically we shall do very little for it unless we are made to think we are, at the same time, doing something for ourselves.”

“**V**ERSATILITY is an injurious possession since it can never be greatness.”

A b r a h a m L i n c o l n ' s D o n ' t s

“**I** FEEL that I cannot succeed without the Divine blessing, and on the Almighty Being I place my reliance for support.”

“IT IS DIFFICULT to make a man miserable while he feels he is worthy of himself.”

A b r a h a m L i n c o l n ' s D o n ' t s

“**T**WO PRINCIPLES have stood face to face from the beginning of time and will ever continue to struggle. The one is the common right of humanity: the other is the divine right of kings.”

“TEACH MEN that what they cannot take by an election they cannot take by war.”

“SOME PEOPLE say they could not take well to my proclamation, but now that I have the varioloid, I am happy to say I have something that everybody can take!”

“THE PROBABILITY that we may fail in the struggle ought not to deter us from the support of a cause which we deem to be just.”

“**S**HALL HE who cannot do
do much be for that reason
excused if he do *nothing*?”

“IF THE END brings me out
all right, what is said against me
won't amount to anything.”

“KEEP pegging away!”

“**T**HOSE who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves; and, under a just God, cannot long retain it.”

“**W**HEN AN OCCASION is piled high with difficulty, we must rise to the occasion.”

“SOME MEN are like the stump the old farmer had in his field—too hard to uproot, too knotty to split, and too wet and soggy to burn. The neighbors asked him what he did about it. ‘Well, now, boys,’ he answered, ‘if you won’t tell the secret I’ll tell you. I just *ploughed around it.*’ ”

“THE PLAINEST print cannot be read through a gold eagle.”

“**W**HEN I was a boy I used to get irritated when anybody talked to me in a way I could not understand. I can remember going into my little bedroom after hearing the neighbors talk with my father, and trying to make out what was the exact meaning of their—to me—dark sayings.

“I could not sleep, when I got on such a hunt after an idea, until I had caught it; and when I thought I had got it, I was not satisfied until I had repeated it over and over and put it in language plain enough, as I thought, for any boy I knew to comprehend. This was a kind of passion with me, and it has stuck by me; for I am never easy now, when I am handling a thought, till

A b r a h a m L i n c o l n ' s D o n ' t s

I have bounded it north, and bounded it south, and bounded it east, and bounded it west.”

“**I** SAY that, whereas God Almighty has given every man one mouth to be fed and one pair of hands to furnish food for that mouth, if anything can be proved to be the will of heaven, it is proved by this fact, that that mouth is to be fed by those hands without being interfered with by any other man, who has also his mouth to feed and his hands to labor with.”

“**W**HEN I was studying law, I said to myself, ‘What do I mean when I say “demonstrate?”’ I consulted all the dictionaries and books of reference—but you might as well have tried to define ‘blue’ to a blind man! At last I said: ‘Lincoln, you can never make a lawyer if you don’t understand what “demonstrate” means.’

“So I went home and stayed there until I could give any proposition in the six books of Euclid at sight. I then found out what ‘demonstrate’ means.”

“**Q**UARREL NOT at all! A man resolved to make the most of himself can spare no time for personal contention.”

“**REMEMBER** that some things legally right are not morally right.”

“**Y**OU’LL HAVE to get some other fellow to win this case for you. I couldn’t do it. All the time, while talking to that jury, I’d be thinking, ‘Lincoln, you’re a liar!’ And I believe I should forget myself and say it out loud.”

“**FIGHTING** proves nothing that is really at stake.”

“**L**ET REVERENCE for the laws be breathed by every American mother to the lisping babe that prattles on her lap; let it be taught in schools, in seminaries and colleges; let it be written in primers, spelling books and almanacs; let it be preached from the pulpit, proclaimed in legislative halls, and enforced in courts of justice. And, in short, let it become the political religion of the nation; and let the old and the young, the rich and the poor, the grave and gay of all sexes and tongues and colors and conditions sacrifice unceasingly upon its altars.”

A b r a h a m L i n c o l n ' s D o n ' t s

“**I** HAVE MORE pegs than holes to put them in—and some square pegs for the round holes.”

“IF THE END brings me out wrong, ten angels swearing I was right would make no difference.”

“IF WE HOLD power we bear responsibility.”

A b r a h a m L i n c o l n ' s D o n ' t s

“**I** SHALL TRY to correct errors when shown to be errors; and I shall adopt new views as fast as they shall appear to be true views.”

“WE MEAN to be as deliberate as it is possible to be; but as firm and resolved as it is possible for men to be.”

“**I** SHALL never be old enough to speak without embarrassment when I have nothing to talk about.”

“IT ADDS nothing to my satisfaction that another man shall be disappointed.”

“THERE IS something ludicrous in promises of good or threats of evil a great way off.”

“**W**HEN ANY CHURCH
will inscribe over its altar,
as its sole qualification
for membership, the Saviour’s condensed statement of both law and gospel, that Church I will join with all my heart and soul.”

“**MERCY** bears richer rewards than strict justice.”

“**I** FEEL that the time is coming when the sun shall shine, and the rain fall on no man who shall go forth to unrequited toil.”

“IF YOU would win a man to your cause, first convince him that you are his sincere friend.”

“IT IS NOT MUCH in the nature of man to be *driven* to do anything.”

“**I** HAVE BEEN DRIVEN many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go.”

“ALLOW ME to assure you that suspicion and jealousy never did help any man in any situation.”

“‘EASY come, easy go;’ I am slow to learn and slow to forget.”

“**T**HE WAY for a young man to rise is, to improve himself in every way he can.”

“**D**ETERMINE that the thing can and shall be done, and then—find the way!”

“**S**TAND with anybody that stands right, and *part* with him when he goes *wrong!*”

A b r a h a m L i n c o l n ' s D o n ' t s

“**T**ELL the whole truth. The most damaging lie is the one that is part true.”

“**W**EALTH is too much of something we don't need.”

“**Y**OU **N**EVER regret what you don't write.”

“**H**AVE confidence in yourself.”

“**T**HOUGH much provoked,
let us do nothing through
passion or ill-temper.”

“**DON'T CROSS** Fox River
until you get to it.”

“**WE ALL** like the man who
‘sticks, through thick and thin.’ ”

“**N**OTHING worth while is lost by taking time enough to do it right.”

“**LIKE** the boy that ‘stumped’ his toe—hurt too much to laugh, and too big to cry.”

“**THERE IS** nothing like getting used to things.”

“SOME MEN’S opinions are adjustable—like the pair of pantaloons the Yankee peddler offered for sale — ‘Large enough for any man—small enough for any boy.’ ”

“NOW, SONNY, don’t fail to keep that pledge and it will be the best act of your life.”

“**T**AKE ALL the Bible upon reason that you can, and the balance on faith, and you will live and die a better man.”

“KILLING the dog does not cure the bite.”

“IF YOU have no friends you will have no pleasure.”

“DON'T GET between the woman's skillet and the man's ax-helve.”

“MY BOY, don't *try* to be President. If you do you never will be.”

“NEVER send a wrathful letter—*burn it*, and write another.”

A b r a h a m L i n c o l n ' s D o n ' t s

“**Y**OU REMIND me of the boy that set forty-three eggs under one hen, and then told his mother:

“ ‘I just wanted to see her spread herself!’ ”

“**DON'T FALTER** when you know you are right.”

“**BE CHEERFUL** at all times.”

A b r a h a m L i n c o l n ' s D o n ' t s

“**B**E a patriot! Don’t mar that immortal emblem of humanity, the Declaration of Independence.”

“WHEN YOU know you have done a mean thing—‘own up!’ ”

“DON’T WAIT to be hunted up and pushed forward.”

A b r a h a m L i n c o l n ' s D o n ' t s

“**G**OOD boys who to their books apply will all be great men by-and-by.”

“DON'T think anybody else will do your work for you.”

“DON'T PRACTICE *before* the ‘bar!’ ”

A b r a h a m L i n c o l n ' s D o n ' t s

“**I**T is better only sometimes to be right than at all times to be wrong.”

“**YOU** must **DO** something—**YOU** must *act*.”

“**IF** we never try, we never succeed.”

“**N**O MEN living are more worthy to be trusted than those who toil from poverty; none less inclined to take or to touch aught which they have not honestly earned.”

“ALL through life, be sure you put your feet in the right place, and then *stand firm.*”

“**D**IE when I may, I want it said of me by those who knew me best, that I always plucked a thistle and planted a flower where I thought a flower would grow.”

“**YOU** cannot really expect the front door to set up housekeeping on its own account.”

“**I**T is what we have done for others that we think on most pleasantly.”

“**MY EXPERIENCE** and observation have been that those who promise most do the least.”

“**I** AM NOT at all concerned about the Lord being on our side, but it is my most constant anxiety that I shall be on the Lord’s side.”

“**I** WOULD rather be assassinated on this spot (Independence Hall) than surrender a principle.”

A b r a h a m L i n c o l n ' s D o n ' t s

“**G**OD BLESS the women of America! If all that has been said by orators and poets, since the Creation, in praise of women were applied to them it would not do them full justice.”

“**T**HE BIBLE is the best gift God has given to man.”

A b r a h a m L i n c o l n ' s D o n ' t s

“**H**AVE a grain of common-sense. If I send a man to buy a horse for me, I expect him to tell me that horse’s points—not how many hairs there are in his tail!”

“LET OTHERS know their own business.”

A b r a h a m L i n c o l n ' s D o n ' t s

“**I**N TIMES like the present,
men should utter nothing for
which they would not will-
ingly be responsible through time
and in eternity.”

“BAD promises are better
broken than kept.”

A b r a h a m L i n c o l n ' s D o n ' t s

“**I** AM NOT BOUND to win, but I am bound to be true. I am not bound to succeed, but I am bound to live up to the light I have.”

“MAY the vast future not have to lament that you have neglected it.”

“**O**UR PEOPLE are fast approaching the point where it can be said that seven-eighths of them are trying to find out how to live at the expense of the other eighth.”

“WHY magnify the *evil* and stoutly refuse to see the *good*?”

“**Y**OUR THOUSAND pretences for not getting along better are all nonsense; they deceive nobody but yourself.”

“THE SMALLEST things are often the most difficult to deal with.”

“**I**N GREAT contests each party claims to act in accordance with the will of God. Both may be, and one must be, wrong. God cannot be for and against the same thing at the same time.”

“**TWO HEADS** are not always better than one.”

“**P**ERSISTING in a charge which one does not know to be true is simply malicious slander.”

“**T**HINK of the man and the dollar, but consider the man before the dollar.”

“**Y**OU MAY FOOL all of the people some of the time, and some of the people all of the time; but you cannot fool all of the people all of the time.”

“LET them laugh—so long as the thing works well.”

“**I** DON'T think much of the man who is not wiser today than he was yesterday.”

“HE that will fight to keep himself a slave, ought to be a slave.”

“DON'T let joy carry you into excesses.”

“**S**UCCESS does not so much depend upon external help as self-reliance.”

“DON'T indulge in any form of gambling.”

“**WORK! WORK! WORK!**
That's the main thing.”

“**I**F OUR sense of duty forbids,
then let us stand by our sense
of duty.”

“WHEN YOU have to hit—hit
HARD!”

“DON'T expect even the best
men always to agree.”

A b r a h a m L i n c o l n ' s D o n ' t s

“ **A**LL I AM in the world I owe to the opinion of me which the people express when they call me ‘Honest Abe.’ ”

“IF ELECTED I shall be thankful. If not, it will be all the same.”

A b r a h a m L i n c o l n ' s D o n ' t s

“**D**ON'T forget your friends. When trouble comes, the face of an old friend is like a ray of sunshine through dark and gloomy clouds.”

“**THERE** is a certain kind of success that is due to selfishness.”

A b r a h a m L i n c o l n ' s D o n ' t s

“**S**OMETHING had to be done,
and, as there did not appear
to be any one else to do it, *I*
did it.”

“DON'T permit the young men
to drift away.”

“DON'T judge another by what
he thinks of *you*.”

A b r a h a m L i n c o l n ' s D o n ' t s

“**I**T IS the man who does not want to express an opinion whose opinion I want.”

“**THE VALUE** of life is to improve one's condition.”

“**YOU** may say anything you like about *me*—if that will help!”

A b r a h a m L i n c o l n ' s D o n ' t s

“**I** AM NOT so young in years as I am in the tricks and trades of the politician. But, live long or die young, I would rather die now than change my politics and, with the change, receive a fat office, then feel obliged to erect a lightning-rod to protect a guilty conscience from an offended God!”

“**D**ON'T GO TO LAW. Settle it among yourselves. The nominal winner is often the real loser.”

“**KEEP** the jewel of liberty in the family of freedom.”

“**PUNISHMENT** *has* to follow sin.”

“**I**F YOU SAW Blondin walking on a tight-rope above Niagara Falls, where certain death waited on a single false step, would you cry out: ‘Blondin, stoop a little more!’ ‘Go a little faster!’ ‘Slow up!’ ‘Lean more to the North!’ ‘Lean a little more to the South!’ No, you would keep your mouths shut. Now, we are doing the best we can. We have as big a job on our hands as was ever intrusted to mortal hands to manage. The Government is carrying an immense weight—so don’t badger it. Keep silent, and we will get you safe across.”

“**I** LONG AGO made up my mind that if anybody wants to kill me he will do it in spite of every precaution.”

“HOLD ON with a bulldog grip!”

“**W**HY DON'T you laugh?
If I didn't laugh I should
die — and you need this
medicine as much as I.”

“I DO NOT IMPUGN the mo-
tives of any one opposed to me.”

“**I**F THAT VAIN old general had only known how big a funeral he would have, he would have died long ago!”

“CHATTING around the house won't buy the child a coat.”

“**T**ELL THE FRIENDS who doubt my ability that *there's a man in here!*”

“IT WAS a most important incident in my life—when, by honest work, I earned my first dollar.”

“**I** DON'T CARE whether you support my administration or not, if you will only fight for your country.”

“IF YOU can be convinced only through a thrashing, I'll give you one—for *your* sake!”

“**I**F YOU ARE going to put a legend on the new greenbacks, like ‘In God We Trust,’ on the silver coins, I would suggest the words of Peter to the lame man: ‘Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I thee!’ ”

“**I COULD NOT** endure the idea of abandoning even a dog.”

A b r a h a m L i n c o l n ' s D o n ' t s

“**I** WILL WRITE my state papers myself, and the people will understand them. The time will never come in this country when people won't know what 'sugar-coated' means.”

“AN ANT'S life is as sweet to it as ours is to us.”

“**R**EPEAL all compromise; repeal the Declaration of Independence; repeal all past history—but you cannot repeal human nature.”

“I CAN BEAR censure, but not insult.”

“**T**IME, what an empty vapor
’tis,
And days, how swift they
are!

Swift as an Indian arrow—

Fly on like a shooting star.

The present moment, just, is
here,

Then slides away in haste,
That we can never say they’re
ours,

But only say they’re past.”

A b r a h a m L i n c o l n ' s D o n ' t s

“**I** HAVE SAID nothing but what I am willing to live by, and if it be the pleasure of Almighty God, to die by.”

“NEVER be ashamed to ‘mind Mother.’ ”

THE MAN does not live who is more devoted to peace than I am; none would do more to preserve it, but it is necessary to put the foot down firmly, do our duty and do right.'

“GET READY and the chance will come.”

“**T**HE TARIFF is a question of national housekeeping. It is to the government what replenishing the meal-tub is to the family.”

“**HAVE MERCY** on the helpless—especially when they are to blame for their helplessness.”

“**T**HERE ARE twenty-three ministers in Springfield, and all of them were against me but three. I know there is a God, and that He hates injustice. I see the storm coming, and I know that His hand is in it. If He has a place and work for me—and I think He has—I believe I am ready. I am nothing, but truth is everything. I know that I am right because I know that liberty is right. Douglas don't care whether slavery is voted up or voted down, but God cares, and humanity cares, and I care; and with God's help I cannot fail. I may not see the end, but it will come, and I shall be vindicated; and these ministers will find that they have not read their Bibles aright.”

A b r a h a m L i n c o l n ' s D o n ' t s

“**I** THANK YOU for your kind intentions. I have no liquors in my house, and have never been in the habit of entertaining in that way, so I cannot permit my friends to do that for me which I will not do for myself.”

“**MEN** become drunkards because they begin to drink.”

A b r a h a m L i n c o l n ' s D o n ' t s

“**Y**OU WANT TO KNOW
Black’s financial standing?
Well, first of all, he has a
wife and baby; together they ought
to be worth \$50,000.00 to any man.”

“**DROP EVERY** paltry and in-
significant thought for the mere
success of any man.”

A b r a h a m L i n c o l n ' s D o n ' t s

“**D**ON'T SHOOT too high.
Aim low, and common people will understand you.”

“**YOU ARE DESTITUTE** because you have idled away your time.”

“**W**HAT IS IT that we hold
most dear? Our own lib-
erty and prosperity.”

“MY childhood's home I see again
And sadden with the view;
And still, as Memory crowds the
brain,
There's pleasure in it too.”

“ ‘**W**HAT’S THE MAT-
TER with my two
boys?’ Just what’s the
matter with the whole world. I’ve
got three walnuts and each wants
two!”

“FREE LABOR has the inspi-
ration of hope.”

“**D**ON'T BE LIKE the little, trifling steamboat we used to have puffing about on the Sangamon, with a seven-foot whistle on a five-foot boiler, so that every time it whistled, the boat stopped!”

“THE LAW of self-protection is a law of necessity.”

“**D**ON'T PLAN to be a knave.
If you cannot be an *honest*
lawyer, resolve to be honest
without being a lawyer.”

“I AM TEMPERATE in this—
to wit: I don't drink.”

“**D**ON'T BE RECKLESS. I bought a store w i t h a friend. He died, the store ‘winked out,’ and left me with a ‘national debt’ to pay!”

“LET US give up when we are beaten fairly.”

“**A** MAN trying to make a living by politics is like the donkey between two stacks of hay, starving to death.”

“ALL RIGHT, shoot me. If I am uglier than you, I don't want to live.”

“**I** AM GOING to make some return for all my stepmother's devotion, and there is not going to be any half-way business about it.”

“IF YOU become familiar with the chains of habit, you prepare your own limbs to wear them.”

“**I** COULD NOT have slept to-night if I had not saved those birds. Their cries would have rung in my ears.”

WOULD YOU try to disprove a proposition in Euclid by calling Euclid a liar?”

A b r a h a m L i n c o l n ' s D o n ' t s

“**T**ALK ABOUT opportunity!
I studied law out of a forgotten set of ‘Blackstone’s Commentaries’ I found in an old barrel.”

“WHEN A MAN comes to me for help he’s going to get it if I have to lick all Sangamon County!”

“**N**O, NO, my young friend. I know champagne is recommended for seasickness; but I’ve seen too many men seasick ashore from drinking that very article.”

“**T**HAT **S**OME are rich shows that others may become rich.”

“**S**IR, ARE YOU aware that you are using profane language? I thought the Senator had sent me a gentleman, but I see I was mistaken. There is the door, and I wish you good-night!”

“**DO WE GAIN** anything by opening one leak to stop another?”

“**W**ITH MALICE toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in—to do all that may achieve and cherish a lasting peace among ourselves and all nations.”

“**W**HEN YOU’VE got an elephant by the hind leg, and he’s trying to run away, it’s best to let him run.”

“I SHOULD rejoice to be spared the labor of a contest, but being in I shall ‘go it’ thoroughly.”

“**D**ON'T WORRY lest we be late. As the man on his way to be hung said to those who were running past him:

“ ‘Don’t be in such a hurry, boys; there won’t be any fun till I get there!’ ”

A b r a h a m L i n c o l n ' s D o n ' t s

“**I**T IS FOR US, the living,
rather to be dedicated here to
the unfinished work that they
so nobly carried on.”

“NO MAN’S shoulders are
broad enough to bear what must
be.”

“**A**LWAYS SHOW proper respect for the semicolon! He's a useful little chap.”

“MANY have got into the *habit* of being dissatisfied.”

“WHAT USE would it be to me if I had no country!”

“**T**HE DOGMAS of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present.””

“THE HEART is the great high-road to a man's reason.”

“LET us to the end dare to do our duty.”

“**L**ET NOT him that is homeless pull down the house of another, but let him labor diligently to build one for himself.”

“**WE WILL** be remembered in spite of ourselves.”

“**M**EET FACE TO FACE
and converse together—
the best way to efface un-
pleasant feeling.”

“**HOLD** firm as a chain of
steel!”

“**TEACH HOPE** to all, despair
to none.”

“**T**HE PRUDENT, penniless beginner in the world labors for wages for a while, saves a surplus with which to buy land or tools for himself, then labors for himself another while, and at length hires another new beginner to help him. This is the just and generous and prosperous system which opens the way to all, gives hope to all, and consequent energy and progress and improvement of condition to all.”



